TOOLBOXTALK

DROPPED OBJECTS



Struck by hazards are one of OSHA's **Construction Focus Four** hazard categories and remain a top cause of serious and fatal construction incidents. When we think about dropped objects, a hammer or grinder probably comes to mind first. Our exposure is much broader. Tools, materials, access equipment, hoses, cords, lifelines, debris, and even parts of the building can become falling objects.

WHAT GOES UP CAN COME DOWN

Scaffold and mast climber components can become falling objects during erection, dismantling, rigging, modification, and use. Electrical cords, pneumatic lines, and water hoses can pull loose or become disconnected. Even a lifeline can become a dropped object while it is being installed, removed, raised, or lowered. When practical, tools, lines, hoses, cords, and components should be secured or have a backup connection that keeps them from falling if the primary connection fails.

Placement matters. Keep loose tools and materials back from edges and consider what could move them. Wind, vibration, platform movement, a pulled hose or cord, or a worker's foot can send something over an edge. Use toeboards, tool tethers, and appropriate containment to keep an unexpected movement from becoming a dropped object. OSHA specifically recognizes toeboards and screens as falling object controls.

THE BUILDING CAN BECOME THE DROPPED OBJECT

Concrete, masonry, stone, coping, and other façade materials may already be loose before we touch them. Chipping, drilling, grinding, saw cutting, demolition, and removing deteriorated material can provide the movement that finally releases something nearby. Do not focus only on the piece being removed. Consider the material surrounding anything you are affecting as a potential falling object hazard.

CONTAINMENT CAN CREATE ANOTHER HAZARD

Mesh, screening, and debris netting can contain falling material, but they also catch wind. Adding containment to a scaffold, mast climber, or MEWP can increase the forces acting on the equipment. OSHA specifically requires scaffolds using wind screens to be secured against the anticipated wind forces. Approved systems may use openings or other methods to reduce wind loading. Follow the manufacturer or engineered design and never create or modify wind relief openings on your own.

FALLING OBJECTS DO NOT ALWAYS FALL STRAIGHT DOWN

A falling object can strike the façade, scaffold, balcony, setback, or equipment and be deflected outward before reaching the ground. Barricading only the area directly below the work may not be enough. Barricade the area where an object could actually travel, and keep people out while the exposure exists. OSHA likewise requires the area to which objects could fall to be barricaded when barricading is used for falling object protection.

DO

- Secure tools, hoses, lines, and loose components.
- Keep materials strategically positioned away from edges.
- Use appropriate toeboards, tethers, and containment.
- Barricade where objects could actually travel.

DON'T

- Assume temporary connections will remain connected.
- Ignore surrounding façade material during removal work.
- Modify containment without considering wind forces.
- Assume a falling object will land directly below you.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What can become a dropped object besides a hand tool?

   a) Materials, hoses, lifelines, building components

2. Why can work on one part of a façade cause nearby material to fall?

   a) Work can loosen surrounding material

3. Why might a barricade need to extend beyond the area directly below the work?

   a) Objects can deflect outward

References: OSHA Construction Focus Four: Struck By Hazards; 29 CFR 1926.501(c); 29 CFR 1926.451.

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